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THE BATTLE

...OF...

GUILFORD COURT HOUSE

AN ADDRESS

before the Tennessee Division of the

Sons of the American Revolution

...BY...

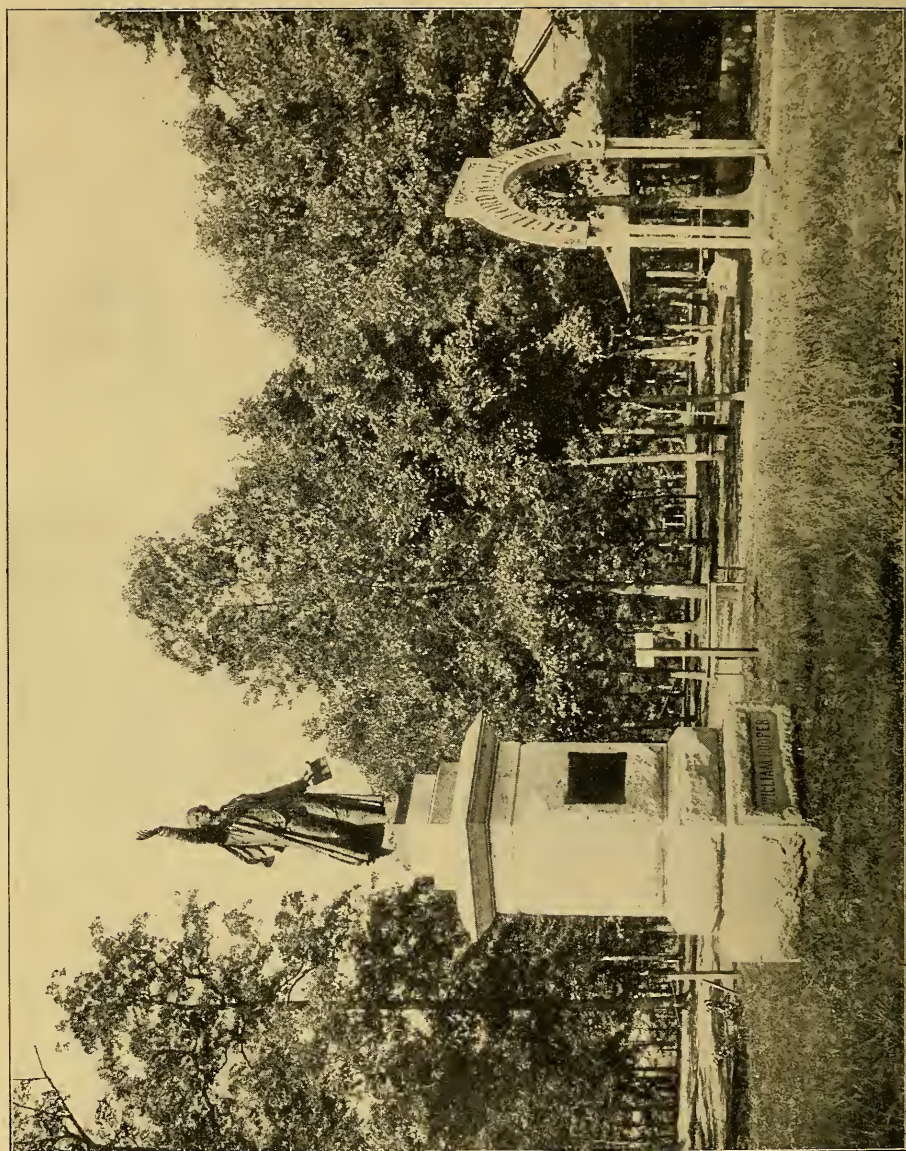
John B. Killebrew
J. B. KILLEBREW, A. M., Ph. D.

At Nashville, March 15, 1901

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GUILFORD BATTLE GROUND ENTRANCE

THE BATTLE OF GUILFORD COURT HOUSE

(An address delivered at a meeting of the Tennessee Division of Sons of the American Revolution, held in Nashville, Tennessee, March 15, 1901, by J. B. Killebrew, A. M., Ph. D.)

Sons of the American Revolution:

One hundred and twenty years ago on the 15 of March last the battle of Guilford Court House was fought in Guilford county, North Carolina, six miles north of the present town of Greensboro, between the British forces commanded by Lord Cornwallis and the American forces commanded by Gen. Greene.

In order to present to your minds a clear understanding of this battle and to invest it with a proper setting, I must go back a few months and trace briefly the course of events that moulded the condition of affairs which brought on the battle—a battle which in its consequences, led to the termination of the long struggle between the colonies and the mother country, securing for the former all the blessings of a free and stable government, and forcing the latter to surrender the most splendid jewel in her imperial crown.

The surrender of Gen. Lincoln with 6,000 men at Charleston, South Carolina, May 12, 1780, left the American forces of the Southern department without a general. Washington recommended Gen. Greene for the place; but Congress, having become incensed with Greene because of his severe arraignment of a new law regulating the commissary department, of which he was chief, appointed Gen. Gates, the hero of Saratoga, to take command. Gates was totally unfit for the position. That old cynic, Charles Lee, who had no love for Washington or any other American officer after the battle of Monmouth where Washington severely upbraided him on the field of battle for cowardice, warned Gates that his "northern laurels would turn to southern willows." His prediction was shortly verified.

Sir Henry Clinton returned to New York and Lord Cornwallis was placed in command of the British forces in the South. He established his grand depot for military supplies at Camden, South Carolina, a small village on the Wateree River near the center of the state and about 110 miles from Charleston. Lord Rawdon was placed in charge. Cornwallis determined to remain in Charleston until the summer heats were over and the harvests were gathered and threshed. When Sir Henry Clinton left for New York he fully believed the war in the South was over; that the rebels were conquered, and he determined to exact military duty of all Carolinians of suitable age. This stirred the bitterest opposition of the Americans and raised a perfect hornet's nest. If they had to fight at all they would fight for liberty and self-government. The old game-cock, Sumter, after the surrender of Lincoln, having taken refuge in the Savannahs surrounded by swamps and canebrakes, soon emerged with 600 followers and struck heavy

blows on all foraging and recruiting parties within reach of him. Of weapons, they had scarcely any to begin with, but in a few weeks they were liberally supplied by their captured prisoners or slain enemies.

On July 25, 1780, Gen. Gates arrived at the American camp on Deep River in North Carolina. He found that DeKalb's division of the army had been detained at that place for want of provisions. Gates ordered DeKalb to move at once on the direct road to Camden. It was another "On to Richmond" order. The route led through a desolate region of sand hills, swamps and pine barrens. The troops had nothing to subsist upon but lean cattle, berries, green corn and unripe fruits. With such a poor commissary many of them fell by the wayside, the victims of indigestion and dysentery. Gates was joined beyond the Peedee River by a few Virginia regulars, who had remained in the country since the fall of Charleston, sometimes hiding, sometimes falling on detached parties of the enemy, and sometimes being hard pressed for provisions. He was also joined by some North Carolina militia under Gen. Caswell. By August 13 the Americans had reached Clermont, 12 miles from Camden, where they were reinforced by 700 Virginia militia under Gen. Edward Stevens. Meanwhile Lord Cornwallis came up from Charleston and assumed command of all the forces at Camden. Of Cornwallis' presence Gates was totally ignorant. He took up his line of march from Clermont to Camden, and the same afternoon Lord Cornwallis started from Camden in pursuit of Gates. They met a little after midnight some seven miles from Camden and between that place and Clermont. A sharp skirmish ensued in which both armies suffered some losses. Gates found that he had miscalculated the strength of Rawdon's forces. DeKalb, the most conservative of the commanders under Gates, was for retreating to Clermont. Gen. Stevens, however, said it was too late to do anything but fight, and fight they did; but it resulted in a most disastrous defeat for the Americans. DeKalb was mortally wounded. The militia threw down their muskets and fled in terror from the pursuit of Tarleton's cavalry. There was no rallying among them but the regulars stood their ground manfully and bore the brunt of the battle. Col. Gunby with the first Marylanders fought desperately. Though often driven back, they quickly rallied and even withstood the charge of the bayonet until Tarleton with his cavalry bore down upon their flanks with resistless impetuosity. This threw them into confusion and drove them into the swamps where the cavalry could not follow.

The result of this battle, as Charles Lee had predicted, withered the laurels of Gates and turned them into "southern willows." Gates first went to Charlotte and then to Hillsboro, where he gathered the fragments of his wrecked army, which altogether did not exceed 1400 men. Hillsboro was distant 180 miles from Camden. His men arrived at that place, gloomy, dispirited, and dismayed. They were without pay, without provisions, and without tents. They had suffered the greatest deprivations during their hasty retreat and had lost all confidence and many of them even respect for Gates. Some of his officers did not hesitate to treat him with disdain. Gov. Nash of North Carolina ordered out the militia and did everything in his power to relieve the dreadful situation.

After this defeat Cornwallis felt sure that the rebels would never rally

again. He despatched Major Patrick Ferguson, a brave, accomplished and skillful officer, to the western parts of Carolina with a force of between 1000 and 1200 men, constituting the left wing of the British army and ordered him "to harass the Whigs, inspirit the Tories, and embody the militia under the royal banner." He was also to overawe and subdue the "over mountain men." Some of the Whigs, who had British papers in their pockets giving them protection, were hanged. These measures soon exasperated the patriots, and a cry for vengeance went up all through the mountain regions. There was a gathering of the clans. Sevier, Shelby, Campbell, Cleveland, McDowell, Winston, Hambright, Lacey, and Williams collected their followers clothed, most of them, in homespun made into hunting shirts, and with William Campbell as commander won at King's Mountain one of the most memorable victories of the Revolutionary War. Ferguson was killed, and all his troops were either slain, wounded, or captured. Everywhere the news of the victory was received with transports of joy and pride by the Whigs. Jefferson said it was "the joyful annunciation of that turn of the tide of success which terminated the Revolutionary War with the seal of our independence." Much, however, remained to be done. Cornwallis was at Charlotte when he received the startling intelligence of Ferguson's defeat and death. To him it appeared an irreparable disaster; for his position was surrounded with the most threatening dangers. The whole region around Charlotte swarmed with armed men ready to attack him. He began his retreat to South Carolina in the night and Generals Davis and Davidson of North Carolina hung on his flanks and rear like avenging angels. They slew his sentries, cut off his foraging parties, and struck him the most deadly blows at every opportunity. Weakened and discouraged he finally reached Winnsboro, S. C., about 25 miles northwest of Camden and within reach of Lord Rawdon and supplies.

These disasters to Cornwallis and the splendid victory at King's Mountain raised the hitherto drooping spirits of the Whigs to the highest enthusiasm. Marion, the swamp fox, and his friends and neighbors, were soon in the saddle. These were brave men of hardy nature, sterling virtues, and abstemious habits. They risked everything for liberty and they kept the enemy busy.

General Gates took his little army to Charlotte. Nathaniel Greene arrived on December 2, and took command on the next day, superceding Gen. Gates. In valor, resources, and ability, Gen. Greene was inferior to no other general in the American service except Washington. In vigilance, diligence, and perseverance, and in a knowledge of details, he was without a rival. He was often defeated but never discouraged. Of all the generals in the service he was the best qualified to repair or profit by a defeat. The first duty of Greene after taking command was to reorganize and discipline his troops. He inspired them with confidence and infused them with his own high patriotic spirit. In the camp gloom gave place to hopefulness and cheerfulness, and the soldiers felt and believed that their operations would be directed in the future by a general in fact as well as in name. The policy of Gen. Greene was the reverse of that pursued by Gates. A pitched battle was to be avoided. The enemy were to be harried, teased, worried by frequent attacks on their flanks and rear, by capturing their provision trains, and by

sending light cavalry to awe the Tories and inspire the Whigs, and so prevent the British commander from organizing the Royalists into auxiliary forces.

As the region around Charlotte had been exhausted of its supplies, Greene was compelled to separate his army into two divisions. One of these under Morgan took its position at Grindal's Ford at the junction of the Pacolet and Broad rivers in the northern part of South Carolina. Morgan was ordered to collect and organize the militia within this district. Greene himself took the other division to the eastern side of the Peedee River opposite the Cheraw Hills. Cornwallis was about 70 miles southwest of Greene, where he was awaiting reinforcements of 1500 men under Gen. Leslie from Charleston. Morgan's headquarters were about 50 miles northwest of Cornwallis, the three forces forming a triangle with Cornwallis at the southern angle. Tarleton with 1100 choice troops was despatched by Cornwallis in pursuit of Morgan. The two forces came together at Cowpens.

In the encounter, which took place at Cowpens, Tarleton's force was almost exterminated. The battle was fought on January 17, 1781, and was characterized by English writers as one that reflected more dishonor on the British arms than any other engagement during the whole war.

The battle was one of the most brilliant ever fought upon American soil, and as an appreciation of his services in winning this victory Congress afterwards voted a gold medal to Morgan. "Seldom," says Chief Justice John Marshall, "has a battle in which greater numbers were not engaged been so important in its consequences." Lord Cornwallis lost a fifth of his army and the most active part of his cavalry.

The British lost nearly a thousand men killed, wounded and captured, while the Americans had only 12 killed and 60 wounded. This was a stunning blow to Cornwallis. When he heard that Tarleton had been defeated, he could scarcely believe it, for that officer had never before failed to win the victory. He set about at once to retrieve the disaster at any cost; and now began a series of races between the two commanders that continued without cessation for nearly four months and culminated in the battle of Guilford Court House.

Morgan, not being strong enough to pursue his enemy and wishing to secure arms and prisoners, which had been captured, left his baggage behind and set out for the country beyond the Catawba. He was closely pressed by the whole of Cornwallis' command and was saved from capture by the providential rising of the Catawba River. Gen. Greene, having left his division of the army in charge of Gen. Huger, in person joined him five days after he had crossed that stream. Cornwallis, though foiled by the rising of the river, did not give up the chase. He pressed Morgan so closely that the latter escaped a second time only by the rising of the Yadkin at Trading Fork. This checked Cornwallis in his pursuit as he was again baffled in his efforts by what the good people of that day ascribed to the intervention of a beneficent Providence. Greene reached Guilford Court House on February 7, 1781, and by the 9th he was joined by the remainder of his army, led by Gen. Huger of South Carolina and by Col. Henry Lee (Light Horse Harry), with his cavalry. This was the first appearance of

Lee with Greene's army. By this time Cornwallis had crossed the Yadkin and was at the old Moravian town of Salem, 25 miles west of Greene. His design was to keep Greene from crossing the Dan River into Halifax county, Virginia, and so compel him to fight before he could receive reinforcements; but Greene knew the weakness of his army and determined to retreat. Morgan was sick with ague and rheumatism and Col. Otho Williams was placed in command of the rear guard with Colonels Howard, Washington, and Lee as his subordinates. Greene led the van with the luggage and stores.

And now began one of the most memorable military races recorded in the annals of American history. Great abilities were displayed by the commanders on both sides. The march was through a thinly populated country, cut up by streams and tangled by forests and broken by ravines. The roads were frozen; the rains at times fell in torrents and the Americans had no tents, were thinly clad, and were often without shoes. They had a scanty supply of provisions, no comforts whatever and but little rest. Both armies moved at the rate of 30 miles a day. On February 13, Greene crossed the Dan in boats and Williams with the rear guard crossed the following day. Cornwallis reached the ferry on the 15th to find that his enemy had escaped. He was deeply chagrined. "Nothing," says the *Annual Register*, "could surpass the grief and vexation of the British army when they learned that all their toils and exertions, hardships and deprivations had been in vain and that all their hopes were frustrated."

Lord Cornwallis from prudential considerations declined to follow Greene into Virginia. After permitting his wearied army to repose for a day or two, he set out for Hillsboro, pursued by Lee and Washington with their cavalry, by two Maryland companies, and by Pickens and his Carolina militia, all commanded by Col. Otho Williams. The pursuers were now the pursued. Lee and Washington, with their light troops were able to strike a blow and retire before Cornwallis could get ready to strike back. Tarleton's legion never recovered from the deadly shock administered by Morgan at the Cowpens, and his horses, being farm hacks without mettle, style or endurance, were utterly unfitted for quick action. Upon arriving at Hillsboro, Cornwallis erected the royal standard and called for reinforcements, proclaiming that he had driven the rebel army from the province. "Many hundreds," says Tarleton in his history of the American war, "rode into camp to talk over the proclamation and to take a view of the King's troops, but there were but few enlistments." Lee and Pickens in their excursions about Hillsboro captured and killed a body of 300 or 400 Loyalists commanded by Col. Pyle, a noted Tory.

After a ten days rest and after being reinforced by 1000 Virginia militia under Gen. Stevens, by Col. Richard Campbell's regulars and by Pickens' brigade, Greene recrossed the Dan, believing that if Cornwallis were left undisturbed he would soon have North Carolina at his feet. Many Royalists upon hearing that Greene had again entered the state returned to their homes. Cornwallis left Hillsboro on February 26, and took his position on Alamance Creek across the Haw from Greene. This position opened his communication with Wilmington where he had his depot of provisions. Greene was 15 miles from Cornwallis on the highlands of Troublesome Creek and Reedy

Fork, one of the tributaries of the Haw. Several sharp encounters took place between the advance guards of the two armies. On the 10th Greene received additional reinforcements which consisted of Virginia militia under Gen. Robert Lawson and two brigades of North Carolina militia under General John Butler and Pinketham Eaton. Col. William Campbell with 60 followers had joined him before on March 3. His entire army, according to official returns at this time, amounted to 4,243 foot and 161 cavalry.

Judge Schenck gives Greene's total number as 1,715.

Greene had with him the commands of Col. Wm. Preston, Col. Wm. Campbell, Col. Charles Lynch, Watkins' dragoons, the Virginia militia under Stevens and Lawson and the North Carolina militia under Butler and Eaton. The number of men under these various commands has never been satisfactorily settled, but Judge Schenck puts the whole of Greene's forces at 5,668 men, rank and file, which is 1,264 more than that given in the official reports.

Cornwallis had 2,400 men, but they were all seasoned veterans, well equipped with arms and clothing, schooled in warfare, whose safety depended alone upon standing firmly united.

Cornwallis, as a precaution before attacking Greene, sent his baggage and wagons to Bell's Mills on Deep River, eight miles from Guilford Court House. Greene had adopted as a wise policy frequent changes of position. His light troops were kept between him and the enemy. This was done to deter the Tories and to deceive Cornwallis, while awaiting the reinforcements which joined him on the 10th.

On the 14th Greene assembled his whole army at Guilford Court House and sent his heavy baggage to Speedwell Iron Works on Troublesome Creek, some twelve miles distant. Both commanders were now ready for the conflict. The advance guard of the British under Tarleton met Lee's legion on the morning of the 15th. The skirmish between these two partisan troopers was brief but severe. Lee had superior horses in weight and strength and bore down his adversary in the charge. Tarleton retreated; Lee followed but had to retire precipitately upon meeting the main force of the British army.

Greene meanwhile arranged his troops in three lines on both sides of the old Salisbury or New Garden road west of Guilford Court House. The general direction of this road is a little north of east and Cornwallis was approaching from the west. The Continental troops were arranged very much as they had been at the Cowpens. The North Carolina militia under Gen. Eaton were placed in the center and at right angles to the old Salisbury or New Garden road and north of it and Eaton's left rested on the road. Butler's brigade of North Carolina militia was placed on the south side, his right resting on the road. The whole line was protected by a zigzag rail fence which separated the woods in which they were drawn up from the open field in their front. Left of Butler were placed 100 men commanded by Arthur Forbis of Guilford county, one of the bravest officers of the North Carolina troops. These were sturdy, solid, Scotch Irish Presbyterians and Forbis himself was an elder in the church.

Two six-pounder cannons under the command of Capt. Singleton of Virginia were placed in the road a little in advance of the North Carolina

militia. On the right flank of Eaton's brigade, Col. Wm. Washington with Kirkwood's Delawares and Lynch's riflemen numbering altogether 280 men formed a covering party, while Col. William Campbell, of Kings Mountain fame, with 60 men, and Major Joseph Winston's command formed the covering party on the left of Butler's brigade. A short distance to the rear of Campbell was Lee's legion which numbered 75 cavalry and 82 infantry. Three hundred yards in the rear of the North Carolina militia the Virginia militia were formed into line. Gen. Stevens with his brigade occupied the southern side of the old Salisbury road and at right angles to it and immediately in the rear of Butler's militia and Campbell's troopers.

On the north side of the old Salisbury road was stationed Lawson's brigade of Virginia militia, which held the same position on the north side that Stevens militia held on the south.

Five hundred and fifty yards in the rear of the Virginia militia the Continental troops and regulars which included two brigades were drawn up in a semi-circular line in an old field on the north side of the old Salisbury road. The first brigade was composed of two Virginia regiments commanded by Gen. Huger. One of the regiments was led by Col. John Green and the other was led by Lieut.-Col. Samuel Hawes. This brigade was on the right of the line. The second brigade led by Col. Otho Williams who commanded the rear guard in Greene's retreat into Virginia was composed of the first and second Maryland regiments, the first led by Col. Gunby and the second by Col. Benjamin Ford. No finer regiment was in the service than the first Maryland. It had been with Washington in his New Jersey campaigns; it was under DeKalb when he joined Gates; it withstood the shock of the British army at Camden and saved the army from destruction; it did valiant service at Cowpens under Lieutenant-Colonel Howard; and it stripped Tarleton of his laurels.

The second Maryland regiment had never been in action and was no better than the militia. Its conduct was the main cause of the retreat of the Americans at the Battle of Guilford Court House. Two pieces of artillery were placed at the flanks of these two brigades.

After the cavalry fight between Lee and Tarleton, Cornwallis moved rapidly forward to attack Greene's main army. At Little Horsepen Creek the head of Cornwallis' forces came in sight of the American troops. Singleton, who, with his two six-ponnders, was stationed in the old Salisbury road just in front of the North Carolina militia, opened fire on the British as soon as they appeared. The British with some three pounders responded. For a time there was a sharp artillery duel during which Cornwallis was putting his troops in line of battle.

The British troops were disposed in the following order:

On the right were placed Major General Leslie with the Hessian regiment of Bose led by Major du Buy and the 71st British regiment led by Col. Simon Fraser supported by the first battalion of the guards led by Colonel Norton. Leslie was confronted by Butler's militia and Campbell's corps. On the left were stationed the 23rd and 33rd regiments led by Col. Webster and supported by the Grenadiers and the second battalion of guards led by Brigadier General O'Hara. The German Jagers, with the light infantry of the guards, occupied a position in the woods on the extreme left of the line.

These forces on the left were confronted by Eaton's North Carolina militia, Kirkwood's Delawares and Lynch's riflemen. Tarleton with his cavalry was drawn up in the road with orders to act as circumstances might demand.

Cornwallis felt deeply the awful responsibility that rested upon him. Never did a commander exert himself more industriously, energetically or bravely to win victory. Defeat would be ruin. In that event he felt that the destruction of his army would be inevitable. He was 140 miles from Camden, the only place from which he could reasonably expect reinforcements and almost an equal distance from Wilmington, the base of his supplies. He was conscious of the hollowness of the professions of loyalty made by the Tories. He directed the attack to be made on the left wing of the Americans where the woods were more open. His troops moved forward with confidence stirred by martial music and fluttering banners. He knew the spirit, the endurance, and the fortitude of his veterans; he knew also that he was outnumbered nearly two to one and that his enemy was fighting for home, country, and liberty, and stirred by the strongest feelings of hatred and revenge.

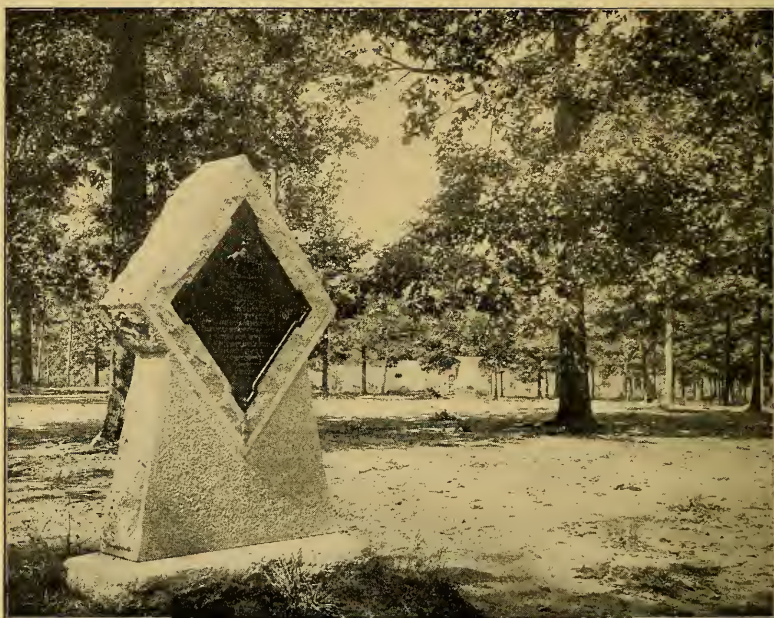
It was on Thursday afternoon, March 15, 1781, about half past one o'clock that the battle began. With great spirit Gen. Leslie moved forward and attacked Butler's North Carolina militia and Campbell's corps. Finding that he was so much outflanked, Leslie ordered the first battalion of the guards, which was stationed immediately behind the Hessians, forward into line. It was placed on the right of the Hessian regiment. The British forces on the right then moved forward and, according to the testimony of Capt. Dugald Stuart, a British officer who commanded a company of the 71st regiment of Highlanders, received a deadly fire from the Scotch-Irish line of the American army, which was composed of marksmen lying on the ground behind the rail fence already mentioned. "One-half of the Highlanders," says Capt. Stuart, "dropped on the spot. There ought to be a very large tumulus on the spot where our men lie buried." A part of the militia under Butler received the name Irish, or Scotch-Irish because they came from that portion of North Carolina settled by the Scotch-Irish.

Campbell's corps withstood the onset bravely but fell back slowly before the English bayonets. After one or two fires however, the North Carolina militia retreated precipitately and in disorder.

Meanwhile the engagement on the north side of the old Salisbury road between the forces under Col. Webster and the militia under Gen. Eaton was animated and brisk. Col. Webster rode in front of his brigade and ordered a charge. In obedience to this order the British in a sharp run came within firing distance of Eaton's militia. They there observed that the whole force of the militia had their arms presented with rests upon a rail fence, taking the most deliberate aim. This is the testimony of Lamb, an English historian, who was, at the time, an officer of the 33rd regiment. Lamb further says: "At this awful period a general pause took place; both parties surveyed each other for a moment with most anxious suspense. Col. Webster then rode forward in front of the 33rd regiment and said with more than his usual commanding tone, 'Come on my brave fusileers.' This operated like an inspiring voice. They rushed forward amidst the enemy's fire,



GUILFORD BATTLE GROUND, SOLDIERS' MONUMENT



THE WOODS—GUILFORD BATTLE GROUND

and dreadful was the havoc on both sides. At last the Americans gave way and the brigade advanced to the attack of the second line."

Tarleton, who afterwards wrote a history of his campaigns in America, says: "The order and coolness of that part of Webster's brigade which advanced across the open ground exposed to the enemy's fire can not be sufficiently extolled. The extremities were not less gallant but were more protected by the woods in which they moved. The militia allowed the front line to approach within 150 yards before they gave their fire.

Capt. Singleton of the artillery who was stationed immediately behind the North Carolina militia told Jefferson that "the militia as well as the regulars behaved exceedingly well."

The tribute to the coolness of Webster's brigade corroborated by a like statement, made by Stedman, another officer in Cornwallis' army dispels the idea that the North Carolina militia fled at the approach of the British forces without the firing of a gun. It is stated from the highest sources that Gen. Greene before the beginning of the battle gave the order to the North Carolina militia to fire twice and then fall back so as to be able to load again. Gen. Stevens, who commanded the Virginia militia on the left of the American line, directed his men to open their ranks and let the retiring North Carolina militia pass through, as such had been the orders given out. Notwithstanding this testimony of eye-witnesses nearly all American historians, from Marshall and Ramsey to Irving and Lossing and Hildreth and Bancroft and even Botta, the Italian historian, have branded the North Carolina militia with the rankest cowardice. Edmund Burke, in his very lucid account of this battle written for the *Annual Register* in 1781, says: "The North Carolina militia shamefully abandoned their post and ran away without at all standing the conflict." Judge Schenck of North Carolina who has thoroughly and sympathetically studied the records of this battle, with the pride of a citizen, the spirit of a patriot and the reverence of a son and has also collated an array of testimony obtained from eye-witnesses, declares that the North Carolina militia did their full duty and only retired when driven by the bayonet and in accordance with orders previously given.

There is no doubt that some of the North Carolina militia fled at the first onset of the British troops; but among the militia were many Tories who had been impressed into service. Some of the adherents of the Pretender Charles Edward who, after the battle of Culloden in 1746, fled to North Carolina and settled in that part of the state, of which Fayetteville is now the centre, were staunch Loyalists.

Before the retreat of the North Carolina militia, as has already been mentioned the British received a most galling fire, not only from the front but from Washington's corps on the right and Campbell's and Lee's on the left. Webster was so hard pressed that he wheeled his regiments to the left so as to face Lynch's riflemen and Kirkwood's Delawares, thus leaving a vacancy on the old Salisbury road, which was filled by the second battalion of the guards. Lynch and Kirkwood were compelled to retreat under the terrible fire and form on the right of Lawson's brigade of Virginians.

The fire of Campbell's corps on the left of the American line was so hot that Col. Norton, commanding the first battalion of the guards, was ordered to support the Hessians. This movement defeated the intention of

Campbell to put his corps on the left of Stevens' brigade of Virginia militia. He was cut off by the first battalion of the guards and became a detached force. Taking to the woods, however, he did such efficient work that the guards were compelled to retreat in disorder. Cornwallis himself came to their rescue and succeeded in rallying them. The Hessians and the guards now being united drove Campbell to the south so far that he never joined the main body of the American army again during the battle. Notwithstanding that Campbell was separated so far from the remaining American troops, he continued to fight. His men would retreat, load their rifles and fire. The British would then fall back and come again with their bayonets, pushing the riflemen back, so that in the end Campbell was driven fully a mile from his original position.

The right of the British line having lost in their pursuit of Campbell's corps the services of the Hessians and the first battalion of the guards, the 23rd regiment was ordered to join the 71st in its attack upon the Virginia militia under Stevens. To do this they had to cross from the north to the south side of the old Salisbury road. Webster at the same time with the 33rd regiment assisted by the German Jagers and the light infantry attacked Lawson's brigade of Virginians, which soon gave way, crossed over the Salisbury road and took position in the rear of Stevens. They then clung to the skirts of the woods so as to escape the onset of Tarleton's dragoons.

At this moment the conflict between Stevens' brigade and the 71st and 23rd British regiments was dreadful. Three times Stevens' brigade drove back the British, and three times were they compelled to retreat before the enemy's bayonets. Their perseverance and valor were remarkable for raw troops and called forth the highest commendations of Gen. Greene. What made matters worse, Lee had abandoned the left wing of Stevens' brigade and had gone to the assistance of Campbell. This exposed the left flank which Tarleton charged vigorously, thereby compelling the Virginians to retreat, not, however, before General Stevens had been shot through the thigh and was forced to leave the field.

But for the unfortunate absence of General Lee, leaving their left flank exposed, they might have won the field. As it was, they fell back on the Continental troops.

The hardest fighting of the day was yet to come. Gen. Leslie, as will be remembered, with his Hessian troops and the first battalion of the guards had been engaged for probably an hour with Campbell's corps and Lee's legion. Leslie's troops suffered greatly and retired behind a ravine to await news from other parts of the field. Meantime Col. Webster, having driven Lawson with his Virginia militia to the rear of Stevens' brigade, did not stop to pursue them further but kept right on through the woods with the 33rd regiment, the light infantry, and the Jagers. He was not accompanied by the second battalion of the guards or the 71st regiment, who had found plenty of work in the engagement with Stevens. Webster soon reached the western edge of an old field that sloped down on both sides to a wet weather branch in the center. On the eastern edge of this old field the Continental troops were in line. The ravine which separated the two forces was probably 150 yards wide from crest to crest. Col. Webster ordered a charge and, like an avalanche down the slope, his forces rushed. In his front were the

first Maryland regiment, Hawes' Virginians, and Kirkwood's Delawares. The Americans awaited with coolness the approach of the enemy, and when Col. Webster reached a position within 40 paces of their front a volcanic burst of fire and lead was poured into the British ranks—a discharge was quickly followed by a furious onset with the bayonet.

Webster's line first wavered and then broke and fled in disorder to the woods. Col. Webster received a wound in the knee, from the effects of which he died in a few weeks.

The repelling of Webster's impetuous attack was the most critical period of the whole day. The fortune of the day at this instant says Burke "seemed only to hang by a hair."

Botta thinks if the Americans had done all in their power just at that time, the British army would have been crushed. If they had taken possession of the hill on the edge of the woods and brought their artillery into play, victory would have been theirs. The English would have been unable to advance fresh troops; their left wing would have been separated from the center and right and the battalion of the guards would not have been able to recover from the confusion into which they were thrown. Had the Continental troops been able to order forward their whole force, the victory would have been won within a few minutes but unfortunately Campbell and Lee were some distance from the scene of conflict. Gen. Leslie and his Hessians, being much nearer, were likely to come on the flank and rear of the Marylanders. The first Maryland regiment was ordered to fall back to its original position on the brow of the hill. Before it had reached the position to which it had been ordered, Col. Stuart with the second battalion of the guards, O'Hara being wounded, and a company of grenadiers impetuously attacked the second Maryland regiment commanded by Col. Ford. It gave way at once and fled, leaving behind two field pieces which were seized by the enemy. Stuart pushed his victory until he was nearly in the rear of the first Maryland regiment, Col. Gunby, the commander, seeing this, immediately ordered a charge. Col. Washington occupying the ridge above the ravine followed with his cavalry. The disgraceful flight of the second Maryland regiment roused in him the fury of a lion. Immediately he sounded a charge and the impetuosity of his attack was terrific. Like a tempest, with lightning in his eye and thunder in his voice, he rushed with his troopers down the slope crossing the stream and swept with the resistlessness of a hurricane upon the second battalion of the guards commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Stuart, striking and tearing backwards and forward through the enemy's line. The first Maryland regiment had charged Stuart's left flank, leaving gory heaps of dead and wounded on the field of battle. The two pieces of cannon were recovered. Stuart stood as immovable as a rock. Cornwallis from the height above witnessed the terrible execution and unequal conflict. The situation required prompt and desperate action on his part to escape the threatened disaster. Stuart soon fell slain in a personal combat with Capt. John Smith of the first Marylanders. But one remedy suggested itself to Cornwallis and that was to order Lieut. McLeod, who had come up with the artillery, to open fire with grape shot upon the struggling mass of friend and foe. O'Hara, who had been dreadfully wounded and who lay bleeding in the road appealed to Cornwallis to

spare his men, but that commander was relentless. Either victory or defeat was the immediate issue. The shotted cannon were turned loose and the struggling body of soldiers were mown down like wheat. The Americans were driven back. The 23rd and 71st regiments of the British came up at this moment and Webster's bleeding command formed on them. These regiments attacked the right flank of the Americans while the second battalion of the guards at the same time fell upon their left supported by Tarleton who came up at full speed with his troopers. Major Joseph Winston of North Carolina, was fighting the Hessians and Tarleton when the Continental troops fell back. Col. Gunby of the first Maryland was unhorsed in the charge and his Lieutenant-Colonel John Eager Howard took the command and fought like a demon.

Assailed at so many points at the same time, the American regulars began to fall back, yet presenting at every step a menacing attitude. They left upon the field of battle not only the two pieces of artillery, which they had recaptured, but two other pieces, losing indeed all their artillery; for the horses were killed and the soldiers were unable to drag it through the underbrush. The action lasted two hours or more, terminating about four o'clock in the afternoon.

A thrilling episode was enacted during the battle that is of more than passing interest. It was the fight between Col. Stuart of the guards and Capt. John Smith of the first Marylanders. Both were men of high spirit and conspicuous for their strength and bravery. Johnson in his life of Greene, gave the following account of this combat:

"The two men had met before and had vowed that their next meeting should end in blood. Regardless of the bayonets that were passing around them they rushed at each other with a fury that admitted of but one result. The quick pass of Stuart's small sword was skillfully put by with the left hand, whilst the heavy saber of his antagonist cleft the Briton to the spine. In one moment the American was prostrate on the lifeless body of his enemy and in the next was pressed beneath the weight of the soldiers who had brought him to the ground. Smith was stunned by the blow but not wounded."

Edmund Burke in the Annual Register in concluding a very interesting account of the Battle of Guilford Court House says:

"Thus ended the very sharp, hard-fought and exceedingly diversified action at Guilford—an action in which the perservering valor and admirable discipline of the British troops were most eminently distinguished. Nothing less, indeed, than an unlimited portion of the one and an unequalled perfection in the other, could have triumphed against so great a superiority of force and such insuperable difficulties of ground. Lord Cornwallis declared, in public orders, that he should ever consider it as the greatest honor of his life, to have been placed at the head of so gallant an army; and the merit was so general, that every corps, and almost every officer above the rank of subaltern, received his public thanks and acknowledgments for their particular and distinguished services." "On the other side it must be acknowledged," says Burke, "that several of the American corps disputed the day with great constancy; and that they rallied, returned the charge, and stood several severe shocks, with a perseverance and courage which would have

done honor to veteran troops. The rebel cavalry very much distinguished themselves. It would likewise seem that Greene showed no common share of ability in the drawing up of his army, the choice of his ground and the disposition of his force. Nor does any want of generalship appear in the course and conduct of the action." "In the whole the loss exceeded 500 men of whom, though scarcely a fifth were killed on the spot, many died afterwards of their wounds; and undoubtedly, a much greater number were disabled from all future service. At any rate, the army was deprived of about one-fourth its number, and that by no means the least effective. The guards lost Col. Stuart with Captains Schutz, Maynard and Goodricke, besides subalterns. Col. Webster, a brave, experienced and distinguished officer, who commanded the brigade on the left, died of his wounds, to no small loss of the service, and to the great regret of the general as well as the army. The Brigadier-Generals O'Hara and Howard as well as Col. Tarleton, and several others officers, were wounded."

The American loss in killed and wounded was about 400. Several hundred of the militia returned to their homes. Judge Schenck puts the loss at only 320 but this is too small according to all reports of the battle, official and otherwise.

This battle was won by British bayonets and not by the superior valor on the part of the British troops. No troops ever fought better or more persistently than the regular troops under Greene. These only were armed with bayonets. The troops without bayonets could not load their muskets fast enough to resist a charge. Whenever the troops on either side were armed equally, as was the case with the cavalry and regulars, the Americans proved themselves to be the best fighters.

On the 17th Greene was at Speedwell Iron Works on Troublesome Creek 12 miles from Guilford Court House where he gathered his forces which he found to consist of 1,350 Continental soldiers, 1,500 militia and 600 riflemen, a total of 3,450. He began the battle with 4,404 men, showing a total loss of nearly a thousand, killed, wounded and missing.

The British were too much exhausted and demoralized to follow up this so-called victory. Tarleton with two regiments made a feeble attempt to pursue the American but was called back and efforts were made to collect the wounded of both armies, but night came on before it could be done.

The day which had been bright and clear up to one o'clock was soon overcast with thickening clouds and by nightfall rain began to fall, which soon swelled into torrents. The darkness was intense. The army had no tents. There were but few houses to receive the wounded. Agonizing shrieks were heard from every side. Provisions were so scarce that many in the British army had tasted very little food for two days. There were absolutely no hospital supplies. "Nearly fifty of the wounded," says Stedman, "sank under the aggravated miseries and perished before morning." The cries of the disabled and dying who remained on the field of battle during the night exceeded all description. "Such a complicated scene of horrors and distress," says this writer, "it is hoped for the sake of humanity rarely occurs even in military life."

Cornwallis' loss, though not so great as Greene's was far more serious. Counting up his losses, he found that 93 had been killed, 413 wounded and 28

missing. This constituted a fourth of his army. Stuart was dead; O'Hara and Howard were disabled; Webster was mortally wounded. His victory was, in fact, a terrible defeat. After burying his dead and providing as far as possible for his wounded, whom he left in care of the Quakers at New Garden meeting house, he set out two days afterwards, disheartened and distressed, for the farther side of Deep River at Ramsey's Mill, where he could open communication with Wilmington, his base of supplies. Cornwallis had captured a few prisoners whom he confined in what was called a "bull pen" of rails on the edge of the woods where Butler's North Carolina militia were first stationed. Here they spent the cold dreary rainy night, herded like cattle, almost famished, and chilled to the bone. They were offered their liberty the next morning if they would join the British army. They rejected the offer with disdain and when they heard the morning salute from Greene's guns away over the hills, an old soldier cried out: "The old cock is crowing again," and defiant shouts went up from that rail pen that made the welkin ring.

Greene, after gathering his forces and hearing of Cornwallis' retreat, started in pursuit of him, the vanquished pursuing the victor. The weather was cold, the roads execrable and there was the greatest scarcity of provisions; yet Greene kept on and arrived at Ramsey's Mill on the 28th from which Cornwallis had fled but a few hours before in such haste that he left some of his wounded who had died on the march unburied and several quarters of beef, much to the relief of the American army.

Though nominally the battle of Guilford Court House was a victory for Cornwallis it proved by after events to be the most terrible calamity that had happened to him during the war. He never recovered from it. His army was demoralized. He was afraid to return to South Carolina and afraid to stay in North Carolina. By June there were only three points held in South Carolina by the British. Cornwallis went to Virginia and on the 19th of October was forced to surrender at Yorktown. Charles James Fox from his place in the British Parliament said: "If the British army had been vanquished they could only have left the field and fled to the coast, precisely the measure Cornwallis was compelled to adopt: Another such victory," continues he, "would destroy the British army." The words attributed to Admiral Coligni might, with propriety, have been uttered by Greene. "I might," said the admiral, "claim superiority over Alexander; over Scipio; over Caesar. They won great battles. I have lost great battles and yet I show to the enemy a more formidable front than ever."

As years elapse the tremendous importance of the battle of Guilford Court House comes more plainly into view. The so-called defeat of Greene was the main factor in terminating the war and establishing the liberties of the American people. It was in its far-reaching consequences the greatest of all the battles of the Revolutionary War.

Thomas H. Benton in his *Thirty Years View*, says:

"The philosophy of history has not yet laid hold of the Battle of Guilford, its consequences and effects. That battle made the capture at Yorktown. The events are told in every history; their connection and dependence in none. It broke up the plan of Cornwallis in the South and changed the plan of Washington in the North. Cornwallis was to subdue the

Southern States, and was doing it until Greene turned upon him at Guilford. Washington was occupied with Sir Henry Clinton, then in New York with 12,000 British troops. He had formed the heroic design to capture Clinton and his army (the French fleet cooperating) in that city, and thereby putting an end to the war. All his preparations were going on for that grand consummation when he got the news of the Battle of Guilford, the retreat of Cornwallis to Wilmington, his inability to keep the field in the South and his return northward through the lower part of Virginia. He saw his advantage—an easier prey and the same result if successful. Cornwallis or Clinton, either of them, captured would put an end to the war. Washington changed his plan, deceived Clinton, moved rapidly upon the weaker general, captured him and his 7000 men and ended the Revolutionary War. The battle of Guilford put that capture into Washington's hands; and thus Guilford and Yorktown became connected; and the philosophy of history shows their dependence, and that the lesser event was the father to the greater."

The Guilford Battle Ground Company incorporated by the legislature of North Carolina in 1887 has purchased and improved the site of this battle. Many handsome monuments have been built; the positions of all the lines of both armies have been marked and a museum established. The patriotism that suggested the preservation and beautifying of this battlefield is deserving of the highest applause of the American people.

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